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India's first indigenous aircraft carrier to join Navy by 2022: Sunil Lanba

Revealing that India's first indigenous aircraft carrier will be ready by 2020-end, Navy chief Admiral Sunil Lanba also said on Friday that the "form and fit" of the second indigenous carrier with a conventional propulsion has been finalised.

"The (project of) indigenous aircraft carrier is progressing well and the ship will join the Navy by the end of 2020," Admiral Lanba said at an annual press conference of the Indian Navy held ahead of the Navy Day on December 4.

He said that the process to buy 57 fighter aircraft to operate from an aircraft carrier had been started. About the planned second aircraft carrier, the Navy chief said it will be around 65,000-tonnes vessel.

"We have analysed it, and fixed the form and fit. It is going to be about 65,000 tonnes. It will have catapult-assisted take-off and arrestor recovery.

"It will be conventionally powered and we are going through the process of taking it to the (Defence) Ministry," he added.

As for carrier-borne fighter jets, the Navy chief said a Request for Information was issued and the Navy had received a response from four vendors. He said a RFP (Request for Proposal) would "hopefully" be issued by mid-2018.

Admiral Lanba said the indigenous Light Combat Aircraft Tejas is not yet capable of operating from a ship, adding that the Navy remains committed to the project and

will induct the fighter jet's naval version when it is ready.

"We are committed to indigenisation. We have supported the LCA Navy project and we will continue to support it," he said.

Admiral Lanba said the Navy has already paid its share of costs for the LCA Navy programme, which was around 40 per cent of the total project cost for Mark I of LCA, that is around Rs 600 crore. The Navy is supposed to pay 60 per cent of the cost of the Mark II of LCA.

He said so far the Indian Navy has given around Rs 300 crore for the project, and the transfer of the remaining money is linked to the project's milestones.

"The indigenous aircraft carrier is due to be inducted in 2020. I need deck-based jet fighters by then. The LCA Navy is nowhere on the horizon. At present, it cannot be operated from the deck. It still has to go through carrier compatibility trials; it is underpowered; it cannot take off with ordnance. I need a fighter which can operate from an aircraft carrier and is combat-capable," he said.

"It is a good plane to fly, but what I need is a deck-based fighter that is combat-capable. We are committed to this project. As and when the Defence Research and Development Organisation and Aeronautical Development Agency produces an indigenous deck-based fighter jet, we are willing to induct it. The first indigenous aircraft carrier is designed to operate MiG29K and LCA, so we need deck-based fighters for it also," he added.